

La Bataille Pour La Prusse 1806---*Le Raison d'Etre*...Can the Prussians Improve Their Performance in 1806 and Set the Stage for a Coalition Victory in 1807?



More than 200 years have passed since the great French victory at Austerlitz and the even grander victories at Jena and Auerstedt. Yet, despite the grandeur of the French victories there are still questions to the student of the period about what might have happened differently. Even though they are overwhelming defeated at Austerlitz, the Russians come back for just a year later and give the French all they can handle in the Winter and Spring campaigns in 1807. And despite the Prussian collapse in the four battles presented in this publication--Saalfeld; Jena; Hassenhausen and Halle, the Prussians somehow soldier on, and manage to hold on to work with their Russian allies to almost pull out victories at Eylau; hold on to the fortress at Danzig for several months; and

keep the French occupied throughout Poland and East Prussia into June 1807 before Friedland breaks the Fourth Coalition.

So the premise of these games in this package is that the Prussians could have done things much differently, and had they done so, the outcome might have been much different to what our history reveals. As discussed in another piece in this package, the news of the day clearly was leaning towards coalition victories in both 1805 and 1806....the outcomes at Eylau especially, but also at Danzig and Friedland could have perhaps been changed. Here is a review of each of battles presented and a discussion of some of the key factors which could have changed and perhaps changed the outcome.

Saalfeld: Prussian Elegy Could Have Changed To Prussian Celebration



The French surprised Prussians and their Saxon allies in early October 1806 by moving across frontiers and through the Thuringian forests in their *battalion carre*, where all of the French troops were in close communication with one another. The French, under Murat's screen of light cavalry had pushed aside the Prussians and Saxons with their mixed command at the Battle of Schleiz on October 9. Here, the weaknesses of the Prussian command system were felt, as they would be at Saalfeld; Jena and Hassenhausen. The Prussian system was

just too convoluted and indecive. And at Saalfeld, though the Prussians had good cavalry, they would not use it like the French to screen their enemy from damaging contact.

On October 10, the commander of the Prussian forces, Prince Louis Ferdinand misread the communications coming from the Prussian high command and thought he was to defend Saalfeld against Marshal Lannes and General Suchet. The town of Saalfeld was actually a difficult town to defend since it was in the lowland next to the Saale River. Marshal Lannes was able to bombard the town with some effectiveness and start to assail the Prussian lines from an advantageous angle. Prince Louis Ferdinand, seeing that his lines had been compromised, panicked and personally led the charge of the Prussian horseman onto the French. This inopportune charge resulted in his death. The Prussian lack of leadership depth after the Prince's death would be just the first example of several more to come where Prussians simply could not operate effectively once their leader was gone.

In the Marshal Enterprises game, if the Prussians are able to do even a little better than they did in the original battle, then the subsequent battle of Jena will provide the Prussians a more effective order of battle and the French will be delayed somewhat as to portions of their army's arrival.

Jena: Prussians Could Have Had A Better Army And Deployment

There is no doubt that Jena is perhaps the least competitive of all the major Napoleonic



battles. But it could have been different. If the Prussians prevail at Saalfeld, then maybe they have a better chance at Jena. The Prussians had magnificent cavalry, and if just a portion of that cavalry would have been able to exit off the battlefield, then perhaps some of those troops would have been able to further delay the occupation of Prussia; or perhaps they would have been able to go to the eastern reaches of Prussia and provide more support for their Russian allies,

or extend the siege of Danzig in some fashion.

Marshal Enterprises has created the ultimate what if scenario....***La Bataille de Jena: D'histoire Alternative***...what if the bulk of the Prussian army had been able to unify with the troops at Jena and perhaps a Prussian victory at Saalfeld...then perhaps the French would not have been able to roll up the big victory; French losses would have been heavier; and more Prussians would have been able to cross the Oder river into eastern Prussia. Would Napoleon have been able to prevail at Eylau ?; or would have Danzig been besieged longer?; or perhaps Prussians would have fought at Friedland

leading to a reversal of fortune for the French? For the French, none of these future victories were sure things...just 5000 more Prussians at any of these places may have made a significant difference.

Hassenhausen: A Fresh Approach

The battle at Hassenhausen with Davout defeating the Duke of Brunswick is also no sure



thing. For one thing, had the Prussian commander, the Duke of Brunswick not been mortally wounded, and then perhaps the Prussian army could have survived. But being led by the Prussian King was too much like the Hohenzollern prince Louis Ferdinand leading the Prussians at Saalfeld. The talent simply was not there for the Prussians to have the direction they needed against the resolute Davout and his III Corps generals.

This was the original *Marshal Enterprises* game, after helping to create *Moscowa* with Larry Groves. Based on all of our subsequent designs, we looked to take a fresh approach for this battle. Thus Hassenhausen is not just a copy of Auerstadt but entirely fresh approach. It is now a two map battle with more complex grand tactical considerations.. The Prussians have several options; either they can try for a decisive victory by exiting a sizable force off the map or seek a lesser victory by inflicting losses on the French and seizing the key road network

Halle: The Last Reserve In The West

The final battle of this quartet was the Battle of Halle. Again, the Prussians failed to use their extensive cavalry to good effect. And again, the Prussians were plagued with an



awkward order of battle that ill served the Prussian commander, the Duke Wurttemberg, with a poor organization. And again, the Prussians were failed by the lack of a cohesive plan---just like the other three battles. A better approach for the Prussians would have been to have better defended the Saale crossings and move the Prussian Reserve Korps to Magdeburg in Saxony where the remnants of the shattered Prussian army could coalesce for a more spirited defense of Brandenburg and rest of Prussia. This might have delayed the ultimate Prussian collapse.

But history only has what happened and not what might have happened.

Halle was originally a free print and play game featured on the *Marshal Enterprises* website. As such, it won the Charles Roberts Award.

The Impact On 1807

As can be noted, any increase in Prussian activity in 1807 would have made it much more difficult for the French to prevail. Our *Friedland* game has pointed out how tired and demoralized the typical French soldier was in Winter and Fall of 1807. Think what a few more Prussians in *Danzig* might have done. What might happen if five or six of the crack Prussian cavalry regiments were in Poland in the Winter of 1807. Would *Eylau* become a major French defeat? Prussian arrogance, ever so present during our quartet of battles, might have continued to prevail and the Prussians would continue to be doomed. However, a small change in one battle or the other may have led to the Fourth Coalition prevailing in the winter of 1807.

Why Four Games Instead Of One?



Napoleon used the superior movement of the French Army to set-up battles in 1806 where the Prussians were at a distinct disadvantage. By publishing any one battle, the Prussian player would consider themselves at a distinct disadvantage. Also, the four battles taken singularly are rather small in troop numbers. (More the size of a large scenario).

Combing all four battles in one package, completes the campaign of 1806. By tying the games together, the Prussian has a real chance to derail French ambitions. The French must be very aggressive to maintain the extent of their victories. However by delaying, inflicting damage and keeping their own forces intact, the Prussians have a chance at victory.

The Prussians cannot necessarily stand toe to toe with the French and battle their enemy to a standstill. The Prussians must take their limited advantages and strive to keep their forces intact.

The battles contained in this release can be played by two players, to a conclusion. Use the *Campaign Victory Result* to determine the ultimate victory. The much larger Jena battle will require multiple players and many days to complete,

In a word, the French must be aggressive and the Prussians crafty.